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Is the CIA Hobbled?

The Central Intelligence Agency is under fire once again. For years, the CIA was accused—often recklessly—of doing too much, of hatching too many plots against too many foreign leaders and violating the rights of too many Americans. The abuse-of-power issue is rarely heard anymore. Now, in the aftermath of intelligence failures in Iran, Afghanistan and other countries, the CIA stands accused of doing too little. "We don't have a lot of good intelligence," charges one of the government's highest ranking intelligence officers. "The value of what we have to analyze in almost any part of the world is far less than satisfactory—and far less than most Americans think we have."

The most critical failure came in Iran. In August 1977, the CIA reported that "the Shah will be an active participant in Iranian life well into the 1980s." A year later, an agency study said that "Iran is not in a revolutionary or even a 'pre-revolutionary' situation." Once the extent of the debacle was clear, President Carter and a House committee sharply criticized the CIA's performance. The agency's top Iranian analyst and his two immediate superiors chose to retire. "When people hash over what has been known about Iran, the most significant things were in newspapers—and not necessarily our own," complains one Administration official.

HAMPERED BY POLICY

In part, the CIA was hampered by America's support of the Shah, which prevented CIA agents in Iran from infiltrating the opposition. Policy also interfered with the analysis of intelligence, encouraging experts—at the State Department, the National Security Council and the CIA—to underestimate the Shah's vulnerability. At one point, the CIA even dismissed direct warnings from at least one foreign intelligence agency that the Shah faced serious internal unrest and the threat of Soviet destabilization.

There are also serious questions about Washington's ability to keep intelligence secrets. Some foreign intelligence agencies are holding back information they once freely shared with the CIA, and their chiefs complain privately about the potential for leaks from the eight Congressional committees that oversee the CIA. They are also claiming that former CIA men are able to publish books containing sensitive inside information. Beyond that, the theft of a highly classified manual by a young CIA employee named William Kampiles last year, and the apparent suicide of John Arthur Paisley, a veteran specialist on the Soviet Union, have raised new concerns over security at the CIA.

CIA director Stansfield Turner, 55, gets a large share of blame for the agency's problems. In his two-year tenure, Turner has presided over the most thoroughgoing shake-up of the CIA since its creation in the cold-war days of 1947, and the mood in some corners of the agency is bitter. Soon after taking office, Admiral Turner sent pink slips to some 800 veteran employees, and since then, hundreds of experienced agents have taken early retirement, draining the agency's clandestine operations of veteran spies. Some sources inside and outside the agency agree with Turner that the house cleaning was beneficial, clearing out an intelligence Establishment too set in its ways and finally permitting the advancement of younger people. But others, like a veteran station chief in Asia, say Turner has "gutted" the CIA's operational division and created a "disastrous morale problem."

In his shake-up, Turner decided to appoint outsiders—from Harvard, the Rand Corporation, the Congressional Budget Office and even the Social Security Administration—to run almost every CIA division. "It goes down hard when a whole new set of guys comes in with, if not hostility, at least deep skepticism about the CIA's capabilities and good sense," says one displaced agency official. And the newcomers generated more hostility by farming out some important assign-

[illegible] plagued by a bureaucratic emphasis on

Making maps, analyzing radio signals

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